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ABSTRACT

Green Chimneys, a residential center for emotionally disturbed and learning disabled children in New York, uses farm animals in the treatment program. Children learn horseback riding, animal husbandry, gardening, and farming on a working farm. The program seeks to involve the community and provide training to volunteers, interns, and learning disabled adolescents. The experience with animals and with the farm is seen to be therapeutic, involve students with others in a purposeful way, and help establish a sense of responsibility. Staff is careful to discuss issues of separation or death of an animal. Horseback riding offers a sense of risk at the same time as opportunities for self confidence building. (CL)

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The Therapeutic Use of Animals with the Handicapped

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In recent years without much public or professional recognition, there has been an increasing use of pets and farm animals in therapy for the emotionally ill, the socially maladjusted, the mentally retarded, and those that are isolated and lonely. Until most recently despite the use of animals in therapy at residential facilities and by individual clinicians, there had been remarkably little written about this trend and very little effort made to document the impact of animals. When one considers the number of pets and the size of the pet industry, there should be very little argument that people in the United States and elsewhere have discovered some value for maintaining a pet. What may be surprising is that it has taken so long for some people to recognize this phenomenon and to study its significance. The studies that have been done have shown that a substantial proportion of the targeted populations have been amenable to pet therapy and responsive to it. Recent surveys and meetings have shown that the use of pets and companion animals is now much more widespread than has generally been thought.

Despite the previous paucity of research on the impact of animals and pets in therapy and the heretofore remarkably little written about how they are presently being used, and despite the fact that programs such as ours are widespread and literally unknown, there are indications that the situation is changing. A meeting held under the auspices of the Zoological Society of London in 1974, focused on the role of pets in therapy. Staff of Green Chimneys have made a number of presentations on this topic including the one before the Annual Meeting of the American Orthopsychiatric

Association in 1975. The topic was a major focus of discussion at the Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association in 1977. The Foundation of Thanatology, in cooperation with the Animal Medical Center and the Institute of Comparative Medicine of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University explored Veterinary Medical Practice: Pet Loss and Human Emotion in 1980, and since then symposiums on the Human/Companion Animal Bond have been held in London, England, Paris, France, Hawaii, Pennsylvania and New York. A large number of therapists and researchers are working in the field. The positive results obtained so far, the recent increase in concern for the environment and nature in general, the rise in our adult population, and the movement to reform residential treatment programs, have all culminated in a general increase in the attention being paid to the potential impact of pets and animals.

In a personal communication with Bertram Brown, M.D., the then Director of the National Institute of Mental Health, in June 1977, I was informed that the NIMH Clearing House Information Bank contained only four items related to pets and animals in therapy. As Dr. Brown stated in his letter, "three of the four do not address the therapeutic effect of animals on children, and the fourth is not based on empirical research. The dearth of relevant information in our files suggests a need for research in this area".[1]

A review of the literature today would produce many more titles. In fact, in 1981 The American Humane Association in Denver, Colorado, produced a 25 page bibliography on Pet Facilitated Therapy and the Center for the Interaction of Animals and

Society at the School of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania, produced a 40 page annotated bibliography on the Psychology of the Human/Companion Animal Bond.

Working with Gerald Jay Westbook of the University of Southern California's Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, the Latham Foundation of Alameda, California, is developing a review and information system on human/companion animal bond literature which is expected to be operational in 1982.

The literature on the subject is not limited to any particular magazine, newspaper or professional journal, nor to an professional group but is truly inter-disciplinary.

> Starting with the dog, man has been keeping animal friends in his caves, lean-to's, tents, houses, or apartments for nearly 200 centuries. Almost everyone who has ever owned a dog or other pet knows the value of companion animals. If people are restricted in their social opportunities, a pet can work wonders toward relieving the dread feelings of isolation and loneliness. No mystery there.
>
> But scientists, apparently, can be the last to know. Now, after years of research, statistical analysis and control groups, they are concluding that pets are good for people, not only emotionally but physically...
>
> It is difficult to relate our own lives to the plight of the criminally insane, the emotionally disturbed or even the extremely old, but the lesson is impossible to miss. Animals, taken in and maintained as companions, can make life a lot easier to bear. It is amazing that it took scientists so long to acknowledge their potential.[2]

Numerous authors (Cain, Corson, Condoret, Levinson, Nieburg, Yates) have indicated that animal pets have played an important humanizing and socializing role in human interactions.[3] They cite, as we have also found out, the value one gets from having

something which offers love and tactile reassurance without criticism. This pet-human bond helps satisfy our need to love and be loved, and the need to feel worthwhile to ourselves and others. Domestic animals like to be petted and this petting is both pleasurable to the animal and the child. When a child craves a close, cuddly, affectionate relationship, an animal can provide it. The animal is always willing to give his love, does not withhold it based on a whim, doesn't talk back and argue and provides a continuous non-judgemental relationship.

For the past 30 or more years I have been involved in out-of-home care of children. To provide an environment that would appeal to such families, my family sought a property with easy access to New York City, a place to grow free from harm, sufficient land to be able to raise farm produce and adequate space for a variety of animals.

So in October 1947, we purchased Green Chimneys Farm, an operating dairy farm on Putnam Lake Road in the Town of Patterson, Putnam County, New York.

The earliest literature described Green Chimneys Farm for Little Folk -- as it was then called -- as "a year-round home for little folk from three to six" an age range that was gradually expanded to include children from two to fourteen or through the eighth grade. Our brochure included these lines:

> "Every opportunity is made to bring the resources of a farm and country atmosphere into the curriculum. The daily contacts, indoors and out, with as many pets and farm tools, provide an excellent chance for the child to learn through direct contact...
>
> ... The afternoon gives the children the opportunity for pony rides, hikes, farm chores, as well as free play, all in the safety of the school grounds and

> under the guidance of their teachers. At Green Chimneys the children have a wide selection of pets from which to choose. The older boys raise calves. They all harness ponies and care for them. in general, they go through the motions of farming."

In the middle 1960's Green Chimneys population began to shift radically. For the most part, the admissions were of children with learning disabilities and emotional problems. By the end of the decade of the seventies, the program had become totally a residential treatment center for disturbed children.

To understand the way animals are used at Green Chimneys, one should have a brief overview of the school and farm center program... Green Chimneys is, today, a New York State approved non-profit voluntary multi-service child care agency. One of the programs it operates is a residential treatment facility with an on-grounds special education program. The program is located on a 150 acre farm in rural Putnam County, eight miles north of Brewster and 60 miles north of New York City. The program serves 88 boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 16 and accepts youngsters who are experiencing significant behavioral and academic difficulties to the extent that they are not able to be productively maintained in their natural environment.

The residential program is designed to meet the needs of youngsters with emotional problems combined with learning disabilities. It relies on milieu therapy using an eclectic approach modeled after the European and Canadian Educateur system and the American Re-education concepts, combined with modern child care practices. The ultimate objective is for each child to return to his natural community to lead a more constructive and productive life.

The resident student population come from varied social, economic, and religious backgrounds. The youngsters, for the most part, come from the Greater New York Metropolitan area and a very large proportion are members of minority groups.

The program continues to attract increasing attention both in the media and from professionals in a variety of fields. The farm center's use of animals in treating youngsters has been highlighted in an article in the New York Times, and was featured on an ABC and CBS-TV news and ABC's Good Morning America, reflecting current attention to the study of the human-animal bond. A report was issued on our program by the National Commission on Resources for Youth, The National Consortium on Alternatives to Incarceration through Wilderness and Camping Experience, and favorable comments about our program were printed in an article by Roger Caras in Science Digest in 1981. My article on Pets and Children appeared in an issue of Feelings & Their Medical Significance, in 1981.

The farm center is an actual working farm operating on the grounds of the institution and sharing all the facilities with the residential program. None of the activities would be possible if a sense of ownership of the program wasn't shared and felt by students and staff. Behavior toward the visitors or the variety of animals being maintained would not be as good if the students did not accept the program's existence as part of the tradition of Green Chimneys.

Green Chimneys uses its farm animals and horticulture as an integral part of the therapeutic program. For some time we have been capturing material, all descriptive in nature, aimed at producing a documentation of what is happening at Green Chimneys.

All of the resident children are exposed to the farm program in a number of ways. Youngsters learn horseback riding, animal husbandry, gardening and farming. Some are Farm Guides, hosting the school groups that visit the farm. A careful attempt is made to see and record which children are involved with the animals and to know and describe the extent of the involvement. We watch for the relationship between involvement with the animals and improvement in academic performance and social functioning. The following are examples of progress by students as reported by the farm educator -

D.L. (dob 6/9/70) is participating in two farm programs:
1. Learn and Earn job
2. Class farm vet science program

D.L.'s treatment and enthusiasm with the farm program has increased markedly in the past 5 months. Since he began his Learn and Earn job about 6 months ago he has become increasingly positive in his attitude toward the farm program. The responsibility of the Learn and Earn job seems to be agreeing with him. He is punctual and reliable in his attendance. He is one of the few workers who remembers to call me if he can't come to work. He is conscientious in his work and with periodic checks and reminders, he can perform several tasks independently. I am working toward having him become independent in more tasks. There are no skills out of his grasp. With increased self-confidence and repetition, I see him as becoming one of the top workers.

As D.L. has become more familiar with the animals his confidence in his ability to work with the animals has grown and he fear of them has diminshed. He is still fearful of the larger animals, but his growth in this area has been marked.

D.L.'s work at his job has helped him with his class program. With his increased confidence has come a new interest in the farm science program. He relates well with his peers. He is responsive to my supervision and is developing a sense of responsibility toward completing tasks.

In conclusion, I see a lot of growth in his confidence, esteem, sense of responsibility and his ability to function as a productive member of a group program.

J.S. - when he first started at the farm was afraid of the barn, the animals and the possibility of snakes being around. He started working with a sheep this past fall. Nurturing that sheep has paid large dividends with J. Recently the sheep (Browny) had a lamb, also named Browny. The interactions and nurturance has strengthened geometrically for J. with the sheep since the lamb was born. When I watch J. with the two sheep, the three together seem like a family.

It is with this background that we have become more and more positive that pets and children are a good combination in more ways than one. Similarly, our personal choice to surround ourselves with animals and plants in a farm setting, led us to develop what may be a program in outdoor education for both the children in residence and for the more than 10,000 people from the general public who visit our Farm Center or come in contact with our animals annually.

Today, more and more people are finding that the intermingling of children and adults with problems with those who are problem free, can be beneficial to all concerned. If one accepts the fact that attitudes change more from direct experiences than from cognitive information, then one can soon recognize that the possibilities are truly unlimited.

The move towards deinstitutionalization has in no way reduced the number of referrals we receive for some sort of institutional care. We are striving to provide that care in the best way we know how, while we have continued to explore other activities we can offer on our campus for the general public.

In spite of the fact that Green Chimneys is located in a rural area, there is a community which can be involved and/or integrated with the youngsters in residence.

> The whole move toward the 'normalization' of services requires that we bring the community into the treatment agency as well as the agency into the community.[4]

What better way can this mainstreaming be done than to develop a number of activities on the institution grounds, led by the students in residence and directed towards outsiders? The fact of the matter is that these additional activities add revenue, gain community support for the program, help reduce "town and gown" problems, bring people of all ages to our campus for varying periods of time, and improve the self-concept, self-confidence, and self-worth of the children and youth in residence.

We strive toward continued awareness of the need to protect the rights and privacy of the residents while maintaining a balance between outside activities and residential programs.

Our situation may not be different from others. We serve many populations. The children in residence on the Brewster campus and their families represent a full range of ethnic and minority groups, economic backgrounds and cultural traditions. The community surrounding the institution is predominantly white middle and upper class. Our visiting groups come from all backgrounds, from rural, suburbia and urban communities. When we travel with our plants and animals, we go to locations in the New York City Metropolitan area, 4H Fairs, New York City Harvest Festival, and World's Food Day in Albany, in an attempt to reach people having the least exposure to farms.

Fo years the farm has had a commitment to training. Volunteers, graduate and undergraduate college interns, CETA workers, learning disabled adolescents and student Farm Guides comprise the variety

of people integrated into service in the program. This past year we have been able to train delinquent youth from Putnam County.

We feel that serving the handicapped is our major concern. Not only do we have staff who are trained and experienced special educators, we also have a full range of support services necessary to responsibly carry out these programs. We also realize that we must encourage non-staff persons to work with us or limit much that we do.

In 1978, Using Talent with Animals and Plants (UTAP) was successfully launched with the help of WeCahr (Western Connecticut Association for the Handicapped and Retarded), an advocacy group in Danbury, Connecticut.

The goals and objectives of UTAP were very clear from the beginning. The program was designed to allow Green Chimneys students the opportunity to share and be of service to others so that they might be able to show how they can give of themselves. The retarded and physically handicapped participants require one-to-one help and supervision. We wanted to provide the UTAP group opportunities for creative use of leisure time, free from community pressures which might previously have caused them to withdraw. By offering a variety of year-round farm, animal and plant activities including therapeutic riding, we wanted to assure each individual an opportunity to participate in some activity in the hope that this would help each person accept his/her disability and be able to participate in other community activities.

In 1981 and 1982, we were able to obtain funding for Project We Serve - a program aimed at training Futnam County youth on probation as aides with the handicapped introducing them to career opportunities with plants and animals and providing them with first hand experiences with therapeutic riding and farm chores. In this case, we were seeking older youngsters to add to the effort being made by our younger Green Chimneys students.

Emotionally disturbed children evidence a lack of abstractional ability and oftimes a history of failure in the classroom. The program for the children in residence fosters a combination of a child-centered and activity-centered approach and must be kept relevant to the world beyond the institution. The very nature of the IEP (Individual Education Program) requires that the program be made to fit the child. Add to the regular school curriculum purposeful activities with innovations in learning opportunities and you offer to disorganized, disruptive, hyperactive pupils a chance to succeed. You also provide a step towards reducing the disparity between the world of the school with the real world. It is an attempt to develop a balance between subject matter and student needs, achievement outcomes and learning climate, institutional isolation and community involvement.

Involvement in the farm activities is included in every child's Individual Education Program. The therapeutic values of the farm program have become quite apparent to our staff. Many of the children referred to the agency have experienced problems in their relationships with adults and peers, but readily relate to a docile or friendly farm animal. This new found relationship is used as a

means of enhancing adult and child interaction where the adult works with the child using the animal as the point of mutual involvement. The feeling of success which a child derives from the completion of a simple farm chore such as feeding, cleaning, grooming, and exercising an animal can be utilized to a wonderful advantage in order to improve a child's self-esteem and feeling of accomplishment. Projects in horseback riding, animal care, and other related farm activities can provide a lifelong occupational and leisure interest. What we do can be replicated in an urban setting. It is not limited to a farm.

Through the farm, youngsters learn about food, the concepts of nutrition, and develop skills and attitudes towards living things.

The Green Chimneys Farm Guide program allows youngsters a systematic process of socialization through which they have direct purposeful contact with the many visitors to the Center. They are available to explain to the visitors the nature of the working farm, and to discuss animals under their care. In order to become Farm Guides, youngsters must demonstrate a level of knowledge and competence in caring techniques with written materials, and which is capable of being mastered by learning disabled youngsters.

The Farm Guide program includes a peer tutoring program. Under the direction of the farm educator, older and younger Green Chimneys students are brought together in pairs to learn to work effectively as Farm Guides. They develop a real rapport, trust and respect for one another as they share information, share skills and learn all the required material which they will need as Farm Guides. As Farm Guides, they build self-esteem as they are the ones who will be sharing their expertise with visitors. Through the mastery of

tasks and interactions with visitors, youngsters gain the level of confidence and responsibility that is necessary for them as they leave our residential program to resume their lives in their homes and schools. Simply stated, one youngster related that when he was called upon to be a Farm Guide, he knew he had to pull himself together long enough to complete the assignment he was being asked to accomplish. From these repeated moments of pulling himself together, he was able to leave our setting, eventually complete high school and secure a job in landscaping.

People make programs successful. The bonding which occurs between people at all levels, makes the difference in the atmosphere which surrounds the program. With students in residence working alongside staff, there is a greater understanding of the value and role each one plays in the life of the other.

For those served, there exists the possibility for increased individual attention, increased amounts of instruction and learning opportunities, opportunities to learn from those skilled in a particular field of work, and opportunity to have available a wide range of different and/or expanded programs. For the Green Chimneys Farm Guides, who are themselves being served, or the We Serve youngsters who are in a similar situation, there are additional dividends. They are learning that they are being trusted and that as long as they continue to show responsible behavior, there is no reason to believe that people's attitude will change and not be accepting of them.

The ownership and care of a pet may aid in the development of sound personality traits. The nurturance and companionship heightens the capacity to be loved and to give love. In many

cases animals have helped the child work through feelings of rivalry, possessiveness and jealousy which, in turn, helps provide the basis for wholesome similar feelings toward siblings and adults. As an example, one might reflect on an excerpt of a psychological of a 12 year old boy at our setting -

> Projective testing presents the picture of a depressed, anxious, immature boy with strong dependence needs. He feels the need for close contact with others but has come to expect rejection and fear of punishment. These perceptions and expectations place him in an approach - avoidance situation which he seeks to resolve by caring for plants and animals, particularly horses. These he finds much less threatening. He also seeks relief in fantasy and wish fulfillment.
>
> His anger and depression revolve around his unmet dependency needs and his inability to succeed academically. Again, his ability to meet with success at the farm has measurably increased his feelings of self-worth.
>
> Subject has good intellectual potential and many positive emotional feelings. His involvement at the farm can be used as a springboard to facilitate growth in intrapersonal situations. He has a healthy core that needs a warm, supportive, nurturant, structured and consistent environment so that he can begin to feel safe within that environment. He appears to be making progress both interpersonally and academically at the present time...
>
> Recommendation included the expansion of the child's farm activities to include some responsibilities, i.e., caretaking chores, helping younger students at the farm, and any other farm activities where he will feel responsible.

The role of any pet changes as the owner changes and as circumstances change. Children as "parents" and protectors of pets not only learn recognition of what their own parents are experiencing but this helps release tensions and anxieties. In an age when children are being raised in households where parents are working, there are long periods of time when the child may be unsupervised. The pet provides the necessary companionship and prevents the loneliness and the feeling of abandonment which can lead to general

breakdown in the family situation. The child's responsibility for a pet provides a reason for the child to exist and feel wanted. The pet can also serve as a catalyst for the child in establishing human contact with others. In many ways it is also something which can serve to bring the family together for it is something they share in common. A recent foundation grant has made it possible for Green Chimneys to develop some special week-end programming for the children in residence and their families, using the farm and the farm activities as the means of bringing everyone together.

Our concern with child abuse and neglect, the battered husband and wife and the abusing parent, has begun to produce more and more information on this topic. One thing that may be worth further investigation is the fact that parents who batter and abuse children and who themselves were abused and neglected, rarely report having had a childhood pet. A follow-up study of our youngsters in years to come might be something worthwhile to accomplish.

John Dommers, Director of Education for the Humane Society of the United States, in his article on the child as zookeeper, emphasizes that pet care can teach responsibility. He feels and expresses things that we too have found - that animals will teach the child to be a better observer and reporter of things observed, and will give the shy, awkward or immature child easy conversational openings -

> But more important perhaps is the fact that caring for a small creature is a beginning step toward developing what ecologists call the human ethic...an opportunity to give love and be loved helps him care about...other people...all living things large and small.[5]

Farmers are known to be interested in the preservation of land. They are protectors of the soil. For the most part they are seen as law abiding citizens. They are intelligent, creative and energetic. They are self-starters, self-motivated to perform their daily tasks and prepared to work under great adversity towards a successful end. They are devoted to family and private property. These goals or ideals for our students or the population as a whole, can be fostered through pet care and plant care even in an urban environment.

> A mere appreciation, even love for the rustic rural ecosystem can be a building block to an effective attitude change toward becoming a respectful steward of the earth. Once aware of the give and take processes established between the farmer and the land, children can then incorporate these actions into their own environments.
>
> How many of you can remember wanting to stop at every pasture to offer your lickable hand to the cows? Have you ever felt the warmth of the freshly laid egg, especially after fetching it from underneath a faithful old hen? Were you ever victim of a directed spray of goat's milk as it was being squeezed from the udder? Or felt the rough bristles on a pig's back? If indeed, you can revel in these thoughts, they make for fond pastoral childhood memories of today's child. Since about 90 percent of the present population lives in urban areas, children are often channeled into a society devoid of relationships with the natural world. They may never have a chance to "wallow" in the memories of personal kinship with the environment - a relationship to which the farmer is so closely allied.[6]

Animals protect us and we protect them. Their innocent dependence on us stimulates our own natural tendency to offer support and protection.

According to a recent report by a psychiatrist, "The reasons for which children attempt suicide vary widely, depending on their individual reactions to their experiences. The death of a pet

may be an event of such enormity and pain for one child that suicide is contemplated. For most children, after an initial period of grief, there is a gradual return to previous emotional balance."[7] Loss of a pet is one of 15 warning signs of potential suicide cited in this new publication.

Nieburg and Fischer report children are especially vulnerable when a pet dies because it is frequently a first experience with the death of a loved one.[8] Grieving is considered normal after such an experience.

In situations where animals have been used, there has been an absence of mention of cruelty to the animals. It is not apparent whether this was a natural happening or due to the structure and supervision of staff. We find that in our own case the care and safety of the animal has become a tradition and cruelty is not expected.

Cain, in her excellent study of Pets in the Family System, points out as others too have found, that pets can provide a "dress rehearsal" for later life experiences that relate to sexual behavior, birth and death.[9]

In our own case, the farm staff and social service department formed groups with the children to discuss separation, loss of an animal, sale or disposal of an animal. A system has been worked out which provides time for children to say their good-byes. Corson discusses separation because "some concerns were expressed that a patient might become so strongly attached to a dog that leaving the hospital without the dog might turn out to be a severe trauma for the patient. Thus far, we have not observed such cases of parting problems. This would suggest that the pets did not

monopolize the affection of the patient but rather served the purpose of strengthening the self-reliance and the psychological well being of the patient".[10] The experience of Skeezer sheds additional light on this topic.[11]

Levinson, who has been a forerunner in the use of animals in therapy and who has been available to us for help and encouragement, makes a number of points about the therapeutic role of pets which bear repeating -

... the importance of the pet to man is psychological not practical

... the relationship between humans and animals can oft-times be more salutary than between two humans

... a pet can satisfy a human's needs for loyalty, trust and respect

... a relationship with an animal can be less threatening than a relationship with a human

... animals are alive and as such, provide greater therapeutic opportunities than play toys

... the arena in which one would work with child and animal is much broader than a therapist's office

... animals can speed up the therapeutic process

... animals can be around 24 hours a day if they are needed.[12]

It is not hard to add to this list from our own experience or the experience of others. Already the catalytic effect of an animal for use in establishing contact with people has been noted. The improvement of a child's self-confidence, self-concept and self-worth as a result of his accomplishments with his pet follows. The value of giving and receiving strokes and recognition can be documented. We concur that if the pet is part of the family, then one needs to be aware of this when working with the family. The

family needs to be encouraged to talk about their pets since the human relationships of the family may quickly become more apparent and clearly visible through these conversations. Many of the families of children in residence at Green Chimneys trace their roots to the Caribbean or the South and have vivid memories of animals in their childhood.

Natalie Bieber, in a report issued following a 1976 summer horseback riding program with cerebral palsy toddlers and pre-schoolers, noted that:

> Without some element of risk in their lives, children cannot undergo normal emotional development. Therapeutic riding programs and interaction with horses can provide a controlled risk activity to disabled children who might otherwise be so sheltered that psychological growth is impeded.
>
> Horseback riding can be potent medicine for physically handicapped children. As an activity involving a dynamic interaction between animal and human, it is a form of physical exercise for even the most passive rider. When there is the motivation to actively take control of the horse, it becomes exciting physical therapy. Physical therapists I have worked with have constantly remarked that I accomplish more with their patients in 15 minutes of fun on a horse than they can in 1 hour of hard work in a clinical setting.
>
> Riding makes disabled and special needs children feel good about themselves. They engage in an activity that not even all non-handicapped children can do, and they achieve success because good programs are structured to include a success factor. All this translates to improved self-confidence, self-esteem and ego strength. The result is a happier and healthier child.[13]

Professional journals, magazines, newpapers, radio and television have kept the public informed of the tremendous value of riding. The national North American Riding for the Handicapped Association, Inc., is a well established organization providing assistance and maintaining standards for this activity.

A 1978 article in The Lead Line, described Mehregan, our Caspian miniature horse, a stallion, who was one of only two such animals in the United States at that time. The article not only pointed out the rarity of this breed, but the uniqueness of Mehregan's role as "a four-footed therapist" and adds a little more to our goals.

> Spring through fall, students receive riding instruction on the school's horses and ponies. In the winter when the riding ring is snowed under, Mehregan keeps the students happy by giving pony-cart rides around campus.
>
> Mehregan is always walked at the beginning of the ride to let him limber up, and he is walked again at the end to cool him off before he goes back in his stall. Only one person, the driver, can give commands, or the pony will become too confused to obey. All signals are given as gently as possible the first time they are given. If Mehregan does not respond, the signal is given more sharply to discipline him. He also knows he will be punished if he calls to the mares while he is in harness.
>
> "May of our students have never had a good model of parenting," Miss Humphrey, director of riding, explains. "Some are battered children and some have been neglected. My method of consistent discipline and gentleness combined is something new to them. We're hoping that in learning to train a pony they will gain some of the skills they will need later in life if they have children of their own."
>
> "Mehregan has been a marvelous teacher: Stallions are supposed to be wild and hard to handle, but Mehregan patiently lets even our six-year olds drive him. He is so responsive to the bit that they have to learn to be gentle just to keep from making a sharper turn than they intend to. Yet they've also seen him dancing around when he hasn't been worked for several days, and they see that my discipline is swift when he gets out of line. If Mehregan can teach even a few children something that will help them be better parents, he's earned his keep here."[14]

The educational opportunities at the farm take many forms. The children can be posed practical problems in core subjects dealing with history, social science, mathematics and language arts, in a less structured but frequently more motivating environment than the formal classroom. The discipline is not that of a formal classroom but of the workplace. The program is not

dictated by the classroom "schedule" but flows from the natural daily cycle of farm chores and the "routine" of the seasons. The children are exposed to different concepts of "time" and "necessity" no less important than those of the classroom, dining hall and living unit, and being based on more apparent and less arbitrary realities, usually much more acceptable.

We follow a psycho-educational levels approach in all of our programs and have created a series of cards for all of the activities. Learning is approached as an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary activity and is stimulated and reinforced by a direct hands-on sensory approach.

Some of this can be illustrated by excerpts from a recent report from the riding instructor to the principal at Green Chimneys -

> I'm an education person -- not a recreational therapist or an animal science person. My first priority is helping the children in an educational way...I can use the horse to work on academic skills...
>
> H.A.'s main problem in class is attending to the task long enough to accomplish anything. He comes to the horse barn every morning to sweep the tack room. He must:
>
> 1. sign in
> 2. gather tools
> 3. pick up and put away things in the tack room
> 4. sweep tack room
> 5. get rid of dirt
> 6. put tools away
> 7. tell me he's done
>
> Then I check and if he's done it all correctly, he is rewarded by doing a job he wants to do: feed, lead horses, etc. Sequencing, ordering, and attending to the task have been very difficult for him, but I see improvement.
>
> T.J. had trouble learning to multiply. She wanted to work with the stallion. We made a deal: 1/2 hour work with the stallion for 1/2 hour "concrete" math work breaking bales of hay into sections, converting pounds and quarts of grain, inches and hands of horses, and determining amount of feed and/or medication per horse per pound. Also a journal was kept and corrected. Her teacher saw improvement in 5 weeks.
>
> Laterality, directionality and spatial orientation can really be focused on a lot in riding. Directions of right, left, up, down, in front of, in back of, and far and near as well as shapes (circles, squares, serpentines, etc.) are repeatedly used in drill team and riding class. This should apply to many of the LD youngsters.

At the farm then, in an informal atmosphere and work milieu, the children participate in construction, landscaping, animal husbandry, gardening, indoor plant care, tillage, harvesting, vegetable stand management and other farm chores. We are not alone in this experience.

> One of the great side benefits which no one foresaw has been the tremendous parent and community support in terms of time, materials and general approbation... there was concern initially, over whether or not the investment of time, effort and money would be justified in terms of academic achievement. But we have found that each activity opens the door to a number of pathways to learning as a natural consequence...there is a draining of tension and hostility, and a setting of the stage for understanding...each and every child in the program has a personal stage in the successful operation of the farm.[15]

At Steinmetz Junior High School in Schenectady, N.Y. an ecology center is maintained with hundreds of animals of 31 different species. The center is described as "a giant educational hook on which a variety of learning hangs..."[16] In terms of the emotionally disturbed "the center has a therapeutic effect as they assist the pupil maintenance crew clean cages, sweep the floor, feed the animals and care for those that require grooming." There is also a focus on learning in terms of the carpentry to build cages, the research of the requirements for heat and moisture for the animals and the tools needed to build or operate the program. The activities related to raising money to keep it going also provide some tremendous educational opportunities for the teachers.

The therapeutic values of contact with animals are perhaps less obvious but are becoming better known through the current interest they are being given. Much of this has been emphasized already.

Perhaps one of the most illustrative statements on the overall impact of animals in therapy is this summary from Levinson's chapter, "Animals in Psychotherapy" from his 1972 book, Pets and Human Development -

> The use of animals in psychotherapy work with children or as supportive aides at home may be indicated. A group dynamics encounter is established when the pet is part of the therapeutic constellation. With the pet as a focus, the locus of therapy can be transferred outdoors, providing a wider environment in which to observe and interact with the patient. A pet aide, particularly a dog, may satisfy the child's need for physical contact without arousing in him the fear of undesirable emotional entanglements that accompany contact with humans. It is easier for a child to project some of his unacceptable feelings on to a pet. the animal may also assume different roles to a child. At one time the pet is provocative and benevolent, while at others aggressive and malevolent...
>
> Animals, since they have a universal appeal, may also be used as a motivating device to promote group cooperation and "esprit de corps" among children. The use of animals in group settings varies, however, from their incidental use to provide a more homelike atmosphere to their direct introduction into the therapy situation. The use of animals in group therapy will depend upon the age of the children involved and the types of animals available and suitable.[17]

It is the conclusion of this writer that pets serve a variety of needs of children and their families, that one should become aware of the various inter-relationships which can occur as a result of the human-pet bond and that it is important to constantly examine the role pets can play in the life of the child. We have explored a whole range of concerns and happenings.

One must not ignore the objective and perceived usefulness of the variety of activities one can be afforded with pets and animals. The competence displayed by a youngster in these activities can gain him acceptance where even minimal recognition has not been possible before. The opportunities to belong, to participate and the personal interaction that occurs as part of

the involvement with a pet, may be enough to change a child's entire outlook on life. The socialization takes on a very special meaning for some children. The relevance of the activity can have an immediate effect and may bring about immediate interest in an otherwise disinterested youngster.

The bearing of all this to the child's future work opportunities should also be taken into account. Involvement with pets and animals for urban, suburban, and rural youth, carries a promise to open up other opportunities regardless of personal deficits which might otherwise not be attempted.

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